



2020 COVID-19 Face Coverings Survey: Strathcona County Results

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August 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	1
II.	METHODOLOGY	2
	A. The questionnaire	2
	B. Sampling design and data collection procedure	2
III.	RESULTS	4
	A. Demographic overview	4
	B. Overall Results (All respondent data used)	5

I. Introduction and Purpose of the Study

In late July 2020, Strathcona County conducted an online survey of residents' perceptions toward wearing non-medical face coverings in indoor settings where other people could potentially congregate. This is specifically targeted at indoor facilities such as grocery stores and other indoor shops, restaurants (entry and exits) apart from actual dining, medical facilities and other indoor places. This would also include large convention and sports facilities for those watching an event, should these be open again to the public in the future. One's personal home was exempt, although visitors outside of the household cohort would be encouraged to wear a face covering, but this would be at the homeowner's discretion. The use of face coverings has previously been mandated in County owned facilities.

Obtaining primary data directly from residents provides Strathcona County departments with information and enables County officials to make decisions that accurately reflect the perspectives and attitudes of residents. Although the survey was tailored to residents, those living outside the County could also take part in the study if they wished, as visitors to the County would also be required to wear a face coverings when visiting any indoor facility, be it County owned or otherwise.

This report provides a comprehensive review of all steps undertaken in the development and implementation of the survey, as well as a detailed summary of the results.

A review of the methodology associated in the development and implementation of the survey can be found in the next section of this report.

II. Methodology

A. The questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was newly created specifically for this study. The creation of questions was based on published questionnaires from other municipalities and tailored to be answered by residents from both urban and rural parts of Strathcona County. In addition to demographics, up to four questions were asked in this survey:

- At the present time, how often do you wear a face covering in public, while visiting indoor spaces such as grocery stores, businesses, shopping malls and public transit?
- What challenges do you experience while wearing a face covering in public? (Up to 10 options could be selected)
- To what extent do you support or oppose requiring the public to wear a face covering while visiting indoor public spaces such as grocery stores, shopping malls, community facilities etc. in Strathcona County?
- *For business owners only:* A mandatory face covering bylaw would make it easier for me to enforce wearing of face coverings in my place of business.

Due to a quick turn-around of the data analysis, no open-ended questions were asked in this survey.

B. Sampling design and data collection procedure

The survey was made available online on two platforms. The first was through the Strathcona County Online Opinion Panel (SCOOP). The other was an open online survey where information was gathered with Survey Gizmo, which was geared toward both residents and non-residents who were not members of SCOOP. Citizens who worked in Strathcona County but did not reside here could also take part in the study. In addition, people who did not

work in Strathcona County and did not live here could take part in the survey if they wanted. If a bylaw mandating the wearing of face coverings is passed, those people from outside the County who visit it are also subject to the regulations imposed by the bylaw.

The online survey ran between July 30 and August 4, 2020, during which 7,960 people took part in the survey. Although poll based data is based on people who decide to participate and were not randomly selected, and have access to the online poll, the margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is $\pm 1.1\%$, 19 times out of 20. The data was analyzed by Strathcona County's Communications using SPSS for Windows.

III. RESULTS

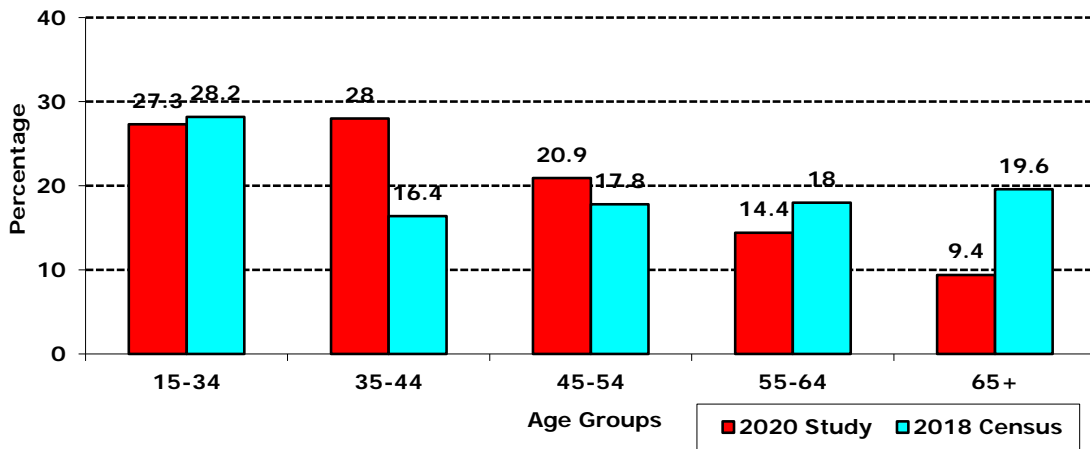
This section of the report presents a summary of the results associated with the perceptions and awareness of residents. Socio-demographic comparisons, where significant, are also highlighted.

A. Demographic overview

This section of the report presents an overview of the type of people who completed the online survey. The final urban/rural split was fairly close to the actual proportions, with 73.3% (n=5,831) of the respondents being from Sherwood Park, 18.8% (n=1,493) living in rural Strathcona County and the remaining 8.0% (636) residing outside of the County.

A breakdown of the age of respondents is shown in Figure 1¹. There was a relatively good representation from most age groups, though in comparison to the 2018 municipal census, the study data for the 65 and older age group was under-represented.

FIGURE 1
Age of County respondents



On a proportionate basis, considerably more females (69.9%) than males (30.1%) completed the online survey. On a numerical basis, however,

¹ Figure 1 excludes those people who did not live in Strathcona County.

there were strong numbers of County males (n=2,171) and County females (n=5,044) who provided their opinions on face coverings usage.

With respect to using the full sample (which included people living outside of the County), the proportion was almost the same. On a numerical basis using all the data there were 2,367 males and 5,473 females who provided their opinions on face coverings usage. An additional 120 people did not disclose their gender.

B. Overall Results (All respondent data used)

The initial question asked respondents to indicate their current use of face coverings when visiting public spaces such as grocery stores, shopping malls and public transit. The overall results are shown in Figure 2. It can be seen that there are more people who choose to wear a face covering than those who do not.

FIGURE 2
How often do you wear a face covering in an indoor space

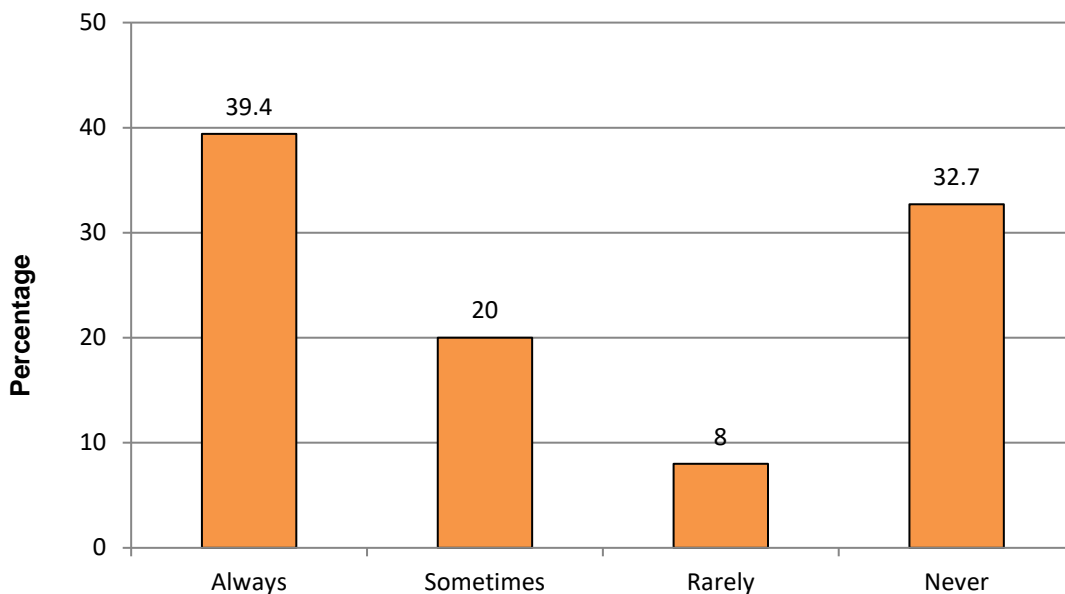
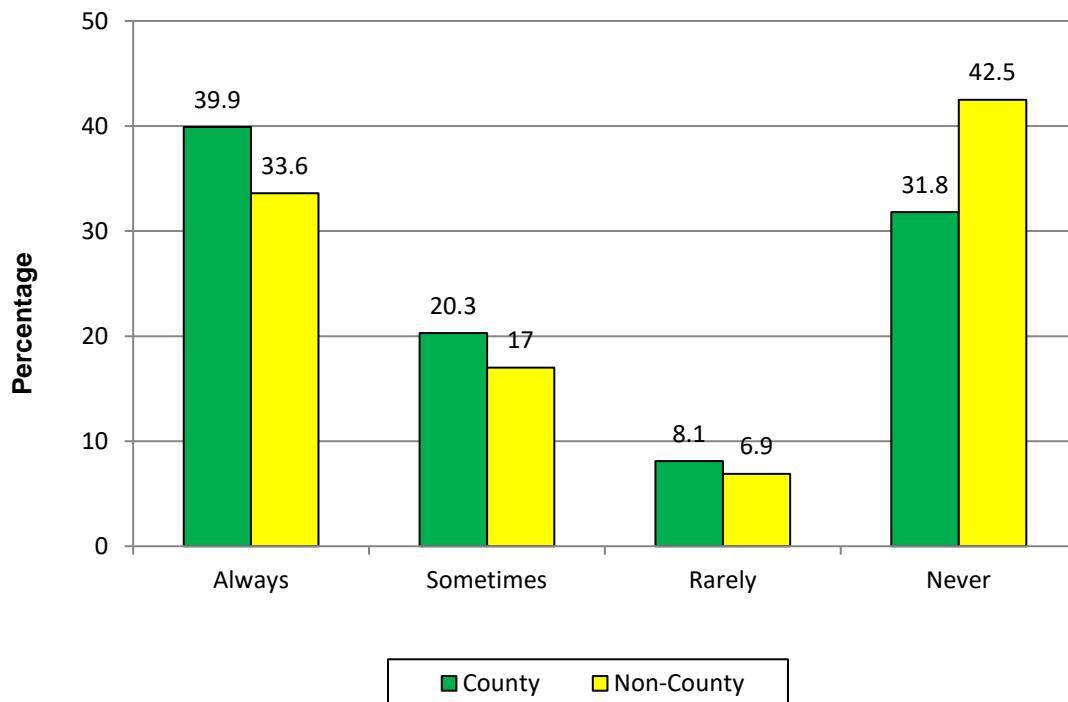


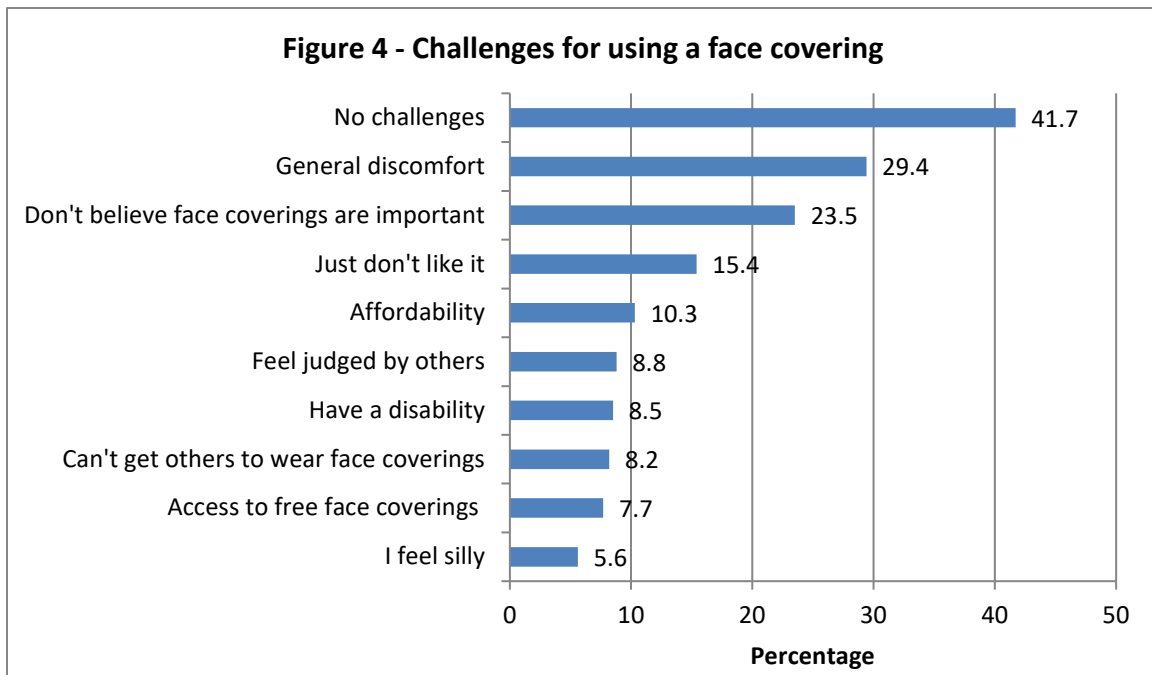
Figure 3 presents a comparison of current face coverings' use between those who live in the County and those who do not. It can be seen that on a proportionate basis, slightly more people living outside the County choose not to wear a face coverings at the present time.

FIGURE 3
How often do you wear a face covering in an indoor space



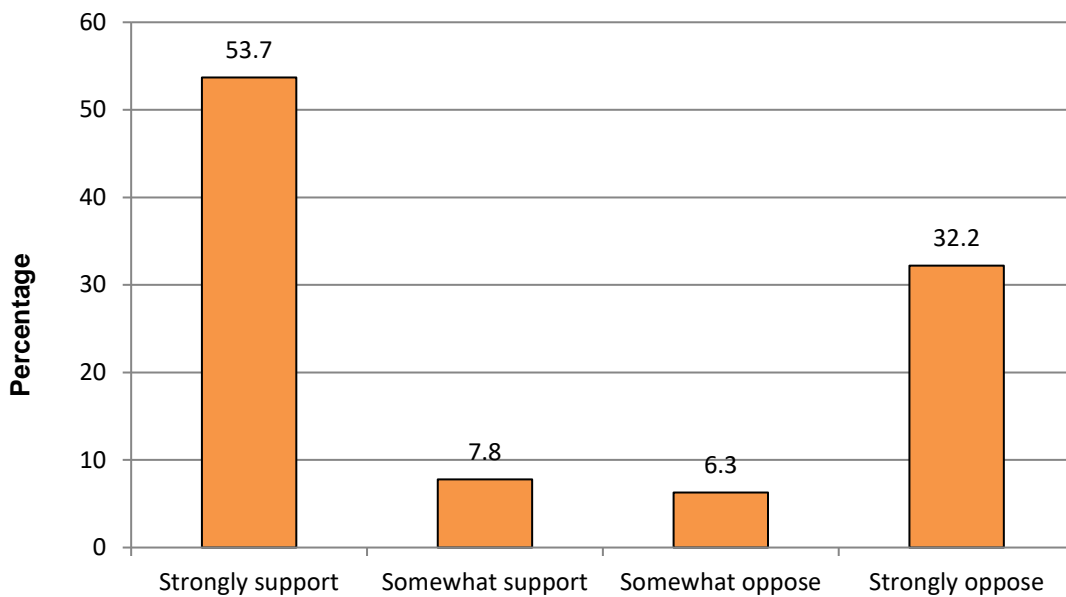
Respondents were then asked what challenges they had (if any) about wearing a face covering in public. Overall, the majority of respondents (41.7% or 3,318 people) did not experience any challenges. Of those who did, the following issues were noted:

- General discomfort – 29.4%
- Don't believe that wearing a face covering is important – 23.5%
- I just don't like it – 15.4%
- Affordability (for purchasing face coverings) – 10.3%
- I feel judged by others – 8.8%
- I have a disability that makes it hard to wear a face covering (such as the need to read lips because of hearing loss, autism, or breathing issues such as COPD) – 8.5%
- Can't get children and/or other members of the family to wear a face covering – 8.2%
- Access to locations where free face coverings were available – 7.7%
- I feel silly – 5.6%



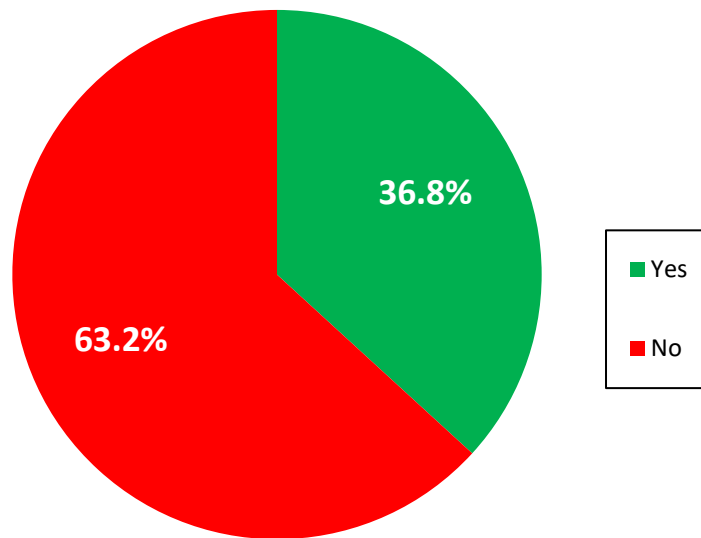
Finally, people were asked to what extent do they support or oppose requiring the public to wear a face covering while visiting indoor public spaces such as grocery stores, shopping malls, community facilities etc. in Strathcona County. The overall results are shown in Figure 5. The majority support a requirement for the public to wear face coverings.

FIGURE 5
Degree of support for the public wearing a face covering



An extra question was added for those in the County who operated or managed a business. Overall, 11.1% of the respondents did. Those people were then asked whether a mandatory face covering bylaw would make it easier for them to enforce wearing of face coverings in their place of business. As seen in Figure 6, the majority did not think a bylaw would make things easier.

FIGURE 6
Would a mandatory bylaw help enforce people wearing face coverings at their place of business?





2020 COVID-19 Mask Survey: Municipal Survey Comparisons



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In late July 2020, Strathcona County conducted an online survey of residents' perceptions toward wearing non-medical masks in indoor settings where other people could potentially congregate. This is specifically targeted at indoor facilities such as grocery stores and other indoor shops, restaurants (entry and exits) apart from actual dining, medical facilities and other indoor places. This would also include large convention and sports facilities for those watching an event, should these be open again to the public in the future. One's personal home was exempt, although visitors outside of the household cohort would be encouraged to wear a mask, but this would be at the homeowner's discretion. The use of masks has previously been mandated in County owned facilities.

The use of masks in outdoor settings is not required at the present time, unless people cannot keep a distance of 6 feet/2 meters apart from one another.

In Alberta, as of Tuesday August 4, 2020, masks were now mandatory in public and catholic schools for students in grades 4 and up. Kindergarten and younger students were encouraged to wear masks, but for a variety of social reasons associated with the age of the children, masks would not be mandatory. All staff, teachers and other adult visitors would also be required to wear masks. It is anticipated that the same rules would also apply to universities, colleges and other private educational settings in Alberta. The use of masks in educational settings may vary in other provinces and areas throughout the United States, as well as other countries around the world.

In anticipation of creating a bylaw mandating the use of non-medical masks within indoor structures, Strathcona County has conducted an online survey that asked a variety of questions about how people feel on wearing a mask within these settings. This will be presented in a separate report. This report will present a brief summary and comparisons of the opinions and perceptions of people in other municipalities feel about this issue.

Please note that there are a variety of factors that may have come into play when these other surveys were conducted. This includes:

- **The time when the surveys were conducted.** Although the use of masks have been mentioned as potential use in the early stages of the COVID pandemic, they have not been mandatory except in hospital settings. Until recently, medical officers, such as Alberta's Dr. Deena Hinshaw, have been non-committal about the mandatory use of masks in settings outside of a hospital or medical setting. As such, information on the benefits (or detriments) of the use of masks have become more prominent over time, and may be more of a factor influencing people's opinions about masks the more their presence is seen by others.
- **Mandated use of masks in other municipalities/countries.** At the onset of the pandemic, the media has reported that citizens in some overseas countries were already wearing masks, either as a result of their governments' mandating the use, or because citizens chose to wear these on their own. Cultural differences could be a factor influencing the use of masks in some regions over others. The resistance toward wearing masks is much more prevalent in North American and European societies compared to other countries.
- **How the data is gathered.** Please remember that there is a methodological difference between surveys that are conducted by telephone (considered to be a random sample) compared to an online survey (which is not random, as the researcher has no control over who answers a survey). Keep in mind, however, that the selection of people who take part in a phone survey is dependent on whether they have a landline. In the digital age, many households have abandoned their landline in favor of a

cell phone, and in North America, it is illegal to conduct a survey with cell phone users unless you obtain prior consent from the user to contact them in that way.

For online surveys, however, while the process is not considered random, an increasing number of research firms and municipalities are making use of this methodology to gather data, and it is, over time, becoming more conventional and an increasingly acceptable method for obtaining feedback from citizens.

- **What questions were asked and what options were given to choose from for their answers.** There is no universal question or question set that is the same for surveys conducted on the use of masks for citizens. Similarly, the answers provided on a question (such as the scale use, whether it is a yes/no question) is not consistent.
- **The potential of answers being influenced by social desirability.** While this is a delicate issue, it is possible that support for the use of a mask may be influenced by how someone perceives their answers might be interpreted by another. Social desirability is an internal perceptual state where someone answers a question in such a way that they think makes themselves look good, or be a socially acceptable response for someone else, instead of what they really think about an issue. For example, if someone were to answer the question "I never gossip about other people" as "true", the odds are that they are lying, as gossiping is a common human condition that people often do for a variety of reasons. Of course, there will be people who never do that, which is why measurements of social desirability are based on a number of questions (and not just one). In the case of mask wearing,

people may be inclined to think this is a good thing to do, but do this because they think others will judge them as good citizens, even though they might actually think otherwise. There's just no way to know for sure.

The municipalities noted in this report do not constitute a complete list. In some instances, municipalities may have not conducted a study of its residents on the use of masks, or have not made their survey questions/results public. There may also be municipalities that have mandated the use of masks in their regions without obtaining feedback from their residents prior to making a decision on masks. In addition to the surveys reported below, mask surveys are currently being conducted in Leduc, Beaumont (nearby communities) as well as Okotoks, AB and Petrolia, Ontario among others. The cities chosen for comparison in this report were a selection of those that had published recent data on trends and perceptions associated with mandating the use of masks in public indoor spaces.

Personal Use of Masks

- Calgary – 34% always wear a face mask in public indoor spaces; 20% usually; 26% sometimes; 16% never (500 responses June 8-14)
- Edmonton – Dependent on the activity: 83% said they *at least sometimes* wear a mask when shopping at stores. This increases to 92% when they go for a medical appointment. We are not privy to what the options in exact scale were used. (6004 responses July 14-21)
- Spruce Grove - 23% always wear a face mask in public indoor spaces; 14.9% usually; 23.2% sometimes; 38.8% never (5,743 responses July 31-August 4)
- ABACUS – The data is based on a Canada wide panel survey: 33% always wore a mask; 22% almost always; 11% half the

time; 11% less than half the time; 23% never (1,500 responses June 26-30)

Mandatory Use of Masks

- Edmonton – 76% said wearing a mask should be mandatory while visiting any indoor public space; 14% said no; 9% were not sure (6004 responses July 14-21)
- Calgary – 59% strongly support masks being mandatory in public indoor spaces; 21% somewhat support; 9% somewhat oppose; 10% strongly oppose; 1% don't know (500 responses July 2-10)
- Spruce Grove – 40.4% strongly support masks being mandatory in public indoor spaces; 10.1% somewhat support; 7.9% somewhat oppose; 39.8% strongly oppose; 1.7% don't know (5,743 responses July 31-August 4)

The jury is still out with respect to any consensus among municipal survey results with respect to mask wearing practices and support for the use of mandatory masks indoors. From a trending perspective, it appears that more people over time are using masks (at least some of the time) and it appears evident is that there is increasing support for mandatory mask use indoors.